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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Oakland Pastor Reflects on the Occupy Movement

by Pastor Brian K. Woodson

During the General Strike, many thousands marched several miles to shut down the Port of Oakland. Ariel Messman-Rucker photo

We, like 99% of the people marching in Oakland, were unified by the desperate condition of our world, our families and our future. We were the cry of the lost oak trees that once lived here, as well as the moans of the Ohlone people who once thrived here.

Wednesday, November 2, I spent the day among millions. Wednesday, the day of the General Strike called by Occupy Oakland, I found myself floating in a sea of humanity whose river flowed, guided by an invisible hand through the streets of Oakland. I believe I felt the presence of God moving or the voice of God speaking, but not in any way that I have before experienced the Divine.

Certainly, the power and peace of God was present, but that presence was so far out of the box that holds my theology, sociology and psychology that I am not sure I can understand it yet. I do not have an umbrella scripture that can encompass the experience or a Bible story that can mirror it. I know deeply that God wishes to speak to me through this experience because the Occupy Movement and those moments in the streets of my city connect so very directly to a lifetime of my prayers and preaching. So, I awakened early on the morning the day after to prayerfully begin to search for meaning.

That Wednesday marked a week and one day after the tragic attempt to disband the Oakland encampment of the Occupy Movement. The attempt turned almost deadly violent. Early that Tuesday morning, October 25, a police force with officers from 17 different police departments, and led by the Oakland Police Department, came to order the campers to leave the plaza in front of City Hall where they had occupied for more than a month.

The police met with resistance. That is to say that there were those who stood to deliberately and determinedly defy the orders of the police. Oakland Police Chief Howard Jordan said his officers were violently attacked and responded. Others report that the police were aggressive and were unprovoked by demonstrators. Whatever the provocation, there ensued that morning an armed police response that included teargas, rubber bullets, bean bags and other so-called "non-lethal" forms of weaponry.

Live reports from the police action recorded moments that sound like a war zone. In the mêlée, a two-tour veteran of the Iraq war, Scott Olsen, was critically wounded when he was hit in the head by what was reported as a teargas canister shot directly at him.

On Wednesday, October 26, the day after the plaza had been cleared, cleaned and sanitized, there was a mass meeting in front of Oakland City Hall. It lasted late into the night. I was there. I was there as a nonviolent clergy person with other nonviolent clergy persons to do whatever we could to prevent any further violence.

A lot of people were out that night. We were shoulder to shoulder and filled the square. During the general assembly, it was decided that there would be a General Strike on Wednesday the following week.

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Poor Women Will Be First Victims of State Cutbacks

"Even if we have to come out in our wheelchairs, even if we have to come out with our guide dogs, even if we have to bring our children, even if we have to come out limping, we will be heard!" — LaTanya Wolf, St. Mary's Center

by Ellen Danchik

On November 15, a demonstration was held at the State Building in Oakland to protest impending "trigger cuts" in the California legislature that will cut hundreds of millions of dollars from essential services. The rally was organized by the California Partnership, along with Parent Voices, BOSS, St. Mary's Center, and the Center for Independent Living.

In the period from 2008 through 2011, the State of California slashed social services drastically, cutting a total of $15 billion from In Home Supportive Services, education, childcare, programs for seniors and the disabled, and medical care for low-income people. All these programs have already suffered severe, sometimes ruinous budget reductions.

Schools have closed, Medi-Cal recipients no longer have dental or optical care, the Brown Bag nutrition program has been eliminated, SSI benefits for disabled people have been reduced to below the federal poverty level, and In Home Supportive Services (IHHS) have been cut by $128.3 million.

When the state budget was passed in June 2011, it was with the contingency that automatic "trigger cuts" would go into effect in January 2012 if not enough revenue was generated in the six-month period from June until December 2011.

The exact budgetary figures will be revealed on December 15, but based on preliminary reports from Controller John

See **Oakland Protest** *page 8*

Clarissa Doutherd and her four-year-old child at the Oakland rally. She described the destructive effects of the cuts on her own family. Photo by Janny Castillo

Berkeley May Sell Its Public Housing to a Billionaire

by Lynda Carson

Tens of thousands of protesters from the Occupy movement are hitting the streets in Oakland, San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles and cities all across the nation, demonstrating against brutal budget cuts and the social inequality that pushes families into poverty and hunger. Yet even as these protests against economic inequality sweep the nation, massive budget cuts continue to devastate public housing and social programs that serve the poor.

The attacks on poor people, workers and students are being carried out on two levels at once, in the form of economic injustice that shreds the social safety net and police repression that brutalizes the demonstrators.

Protesters from Occupy Oakland have been clubbed, tear-gassed, arrested, and shot by police. Peaceful students have been pepper-sprayed at U.C. Davis, and students at U.C. Berkeley have been viciously beaten in violent and unjustified police attacks. In the midst of this highly visible repression, public housing programs are undergoing a less visible, yet equally serious assault that will result in enormous suffering for poor families.

Our nation's 1.2 million public housing units are already in need of more than $25 billion in repairs, and waiting lists for public housing are so long that millions of low-income families who qualify for public housing are forced to wait for years just to get on the waiting list.

Despite this crisis, on November 17, Congress passed legislation that imposed massive budget cuts amounting to $3.7 billion to our nation's housing programs, cuts that were signed into law by President Obama a day later. Public housing is being drastically underfunded, and is now 22 percent less than Obama's original request for FY 2012.

Tens of thousands of public housing units may be lost as a result. And while thousands of families in public housing are placed at risk of living in substandard conditions or becoming homeless, the Berkeley Housing Authority (BHA) has recently entered into an exclusive negotiating rights agreement to sell Berkeley's 75 occupied public housing units to billionaire Stephen M. Ross, and The Related Companies of California.

Public housing residents will be placed at risk of displacement and homelessness if the billionaire owner of The Related Companies and Miami Dolphins gets his hands on Berkeley's 75 townhouse public housing units. Billionaire Ross is already involved in a housing project in Oakland that displaced 178 poor families from their pubic housing at the former Coliseum Gardens Public Housing Project, now called Lion Creek Crossings.

Anne Marie Dent is disabled and resides in Berkeley's public housing. "I do not like what I am hearing about the takeover of our public housing," she said.

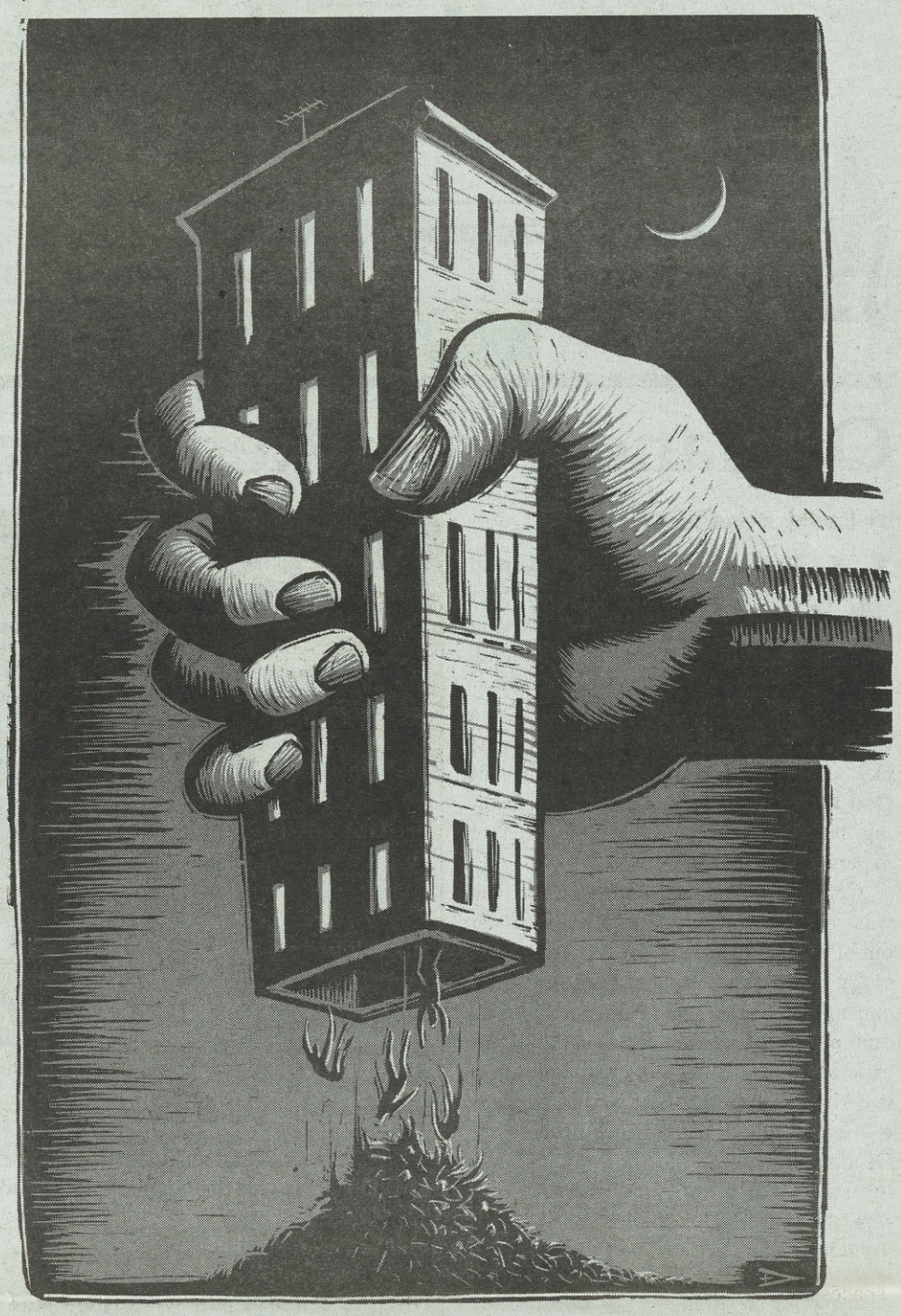
"I am afraid of being displaced. I believe that it should remain as public housing. I do not think that billionaires should be allowed to grab our public housing. It is not fair. There are too many poor people in need currently, and public housing was never meant to be for billionaires."

Public housing resident Anna Smith said, "All I know is that the rumors are going around that the building I reside in is being sold to a billionaire that owns a football team. I heard that I would learn more details from the BHA sometime in March."

Smith said the plan to sell public housing would jeopardize her family's very survival, adding that the prospect of being displaced from her longtime home has already created great insecurity and fear for her children and grandchildren.

"I have lived here in public housing since 1992," Smith said, "and I was told that this was my home to raise a family in. Now I am being told that I will have to move. I have grandchildren living with me that are teenagers in school, and I do not know where I am going to go. I keep hearing about affordable housing projects. But what does that mean? Many people, including myself, cannot afford to reside in affordable housing projects, and there is no place left to go for poor people once all of our public housing is gone."

When asked what is planned next if the negotiations fail, BHA Project Manager Kathleen Sims said, "The BHA is in negotiation with The Related Companies of California, and until those negotiations are over, I cannot say more about the next step the BHA will pursue with its public housing units."



"The Hand That Takes." **Tenants displayed by the powers that be.** Art by Eric Drooker

According to the Center on Budget Policy and Priorities, the nation's Section 8 voucher program has a shortfall in funding of $130 million, and that may result in a loss of 12,000 to 24,000 vouchers. Also, among other programs facing budget cuts, the Home Program was cut by $600,000, and housing for the elderly was cut by 51 percent more than Obama requested.

As federal and state budget cuts continue to decimate communities all across the nation, Republicans and Democrats in Congress continue to allow the rich and the super rich to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. This may well result in the loss of irreplaceable public housing units at the very moment that the nation is in the midst of a foreclosure crisis and an explosive increase in homelessness, hunger and desperation.

Lynda Carson may be reached at tenantsrule@yahoo.com

Corporate Con Games: Tax Holiday or Gigantic Scam?

by Holly Sklar

Lobbyists are storming Capitol Hill, pushing a tax holiday that would give billions of dollars in tax breaks to less than 1 percent of American businesses - and stick the other 99 percent with the bill. But of course, they can't say that. So tax holiday advocates are using a high-powered version of the e-mail con known as the "Nigerian scam."

You're probably familiar with it: a prince, business executive or government official promises rich rewards for your urgently needed assistance to move "funds which are presently trapped in Nigeria" or some other country into the United States. "The con works by blinding the victim with promises of an unimaginable fortune," the myth-busting Snopes.com explains. "He fails to realize during the sting that he's never going to get the promised fortune." Instead, he's going to lose his shirt.

"Currently, there is over $1 trillion earned by American businesses trapped overseas that could be brought back and invested here at home," the WIN America campaign for a tax holiday on "repatriated" corporate profits says in its mission statement. "There is no time to waste, our economy needs all the help it can get."

Never mind that the money "trapped" overseas was moved by U.S. corporations to their subsidiaries in the Cayman Islands, Switzerland and other tax-haven countries in order to avoid taxes. As former Treasury Department economist Martin Sullivan told Bloomberg, "A lot of what companies report as foreign profit is really U.S. profit that should be subject to U.S. tax."

For example, "Cisco transfers a portion of the patent rights to technology developed in the U.S. to a Dutch unit, which sells some of the resulting products back to its parent for eventual distribution in the U.S.," Bloomberg reported. "Cisco credits about $5 billion in U.S. sales annually to the Netherlands."

Cisco, Google, Pfizer and other big businesses in the WIN America campaign have deployed more than 160 lobbyists to convince Congress to let U.S. multinationals pay a "repatriation" tax rate as low as 5.25 percent. It would tilt the playing field even further against small businesses.

Most tax holiday legislation co-sponsors have received campaign donations from WIN America-affiliated companies, reports the Center for Public Integrity.

Congress already fell for this scam with a "one-time" tax holiday passed in 2004. But companies didn't create the jobs or investment they promised — layoffs actually increased.

Instead, they boosted CEO pay, stock buybacks and shareholder dividends, and stockpiled even more money offshore to avoid taxes, according to reports by the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Congressional Research Service, National Bureau of Economic Research and others. Since 2004, the amount of earnings by U.S. corporations held offshore has more than tripled.

"Another temporary holiday may condition U.S. multinationals to never routinely repatriate any foreign profits because, eventually, Congress can be expected to pass another 'temporary' tax holiday," said a Goldman Sachs report.

As more people understand that another tax holiday would be bad for the U.S. economy, advocates are pitching a variation on the "I've got a bridge to sell you" scam that notorious con men like George C. Parker foisted on gullible buyers.

You can use our tax holiday to fund an infrastructure bank to buy bridges, roads and other public works, the hucksters pitch. In this crazy math, a tax holiday that the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation says will cost the U.S. Treasury $42 billion to $79 billion is supposed to finance an infrastructure bank.

If you believe that, I've got a bridge to sell you.

Here's a real way to fund an infrastructure bank with a tax haven link: enact the Stop Tax Haven Abuse Act. That would put $100 billion a year into the U.S. Treasury that is now being lost to tax dodging through tax havens. That would mean real money for rebuilding our infrastructure and other national priorities, which would strengthen Main Street business, job creation and our economy.

"We can't afford the waste of another massive corporate tax break that rewards those who have made an art form of avoiding their tax responsibility through tax havens and other accounting manipulation," says Dean Cycon, owner of Dean's Beans coffee company.

America has suffered enough from corporate con artists.

Holly Sklar is director of Business for Shared Prosperity (www.businessforsharedprosperity.org). She can be reached at hsklar.writer@gmail.com.

National Scandal of Using Jails as Psychiatric Wards

The cruelty, disregard, and medical neglect suffered by poor and homeless mentally ill people is unacceptable.

by Paul Boden, Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP)

The criminal justice system has displaced the mental health system as the main institution for dealing with poor people with psychiatric disabilities in the United States. Federal cuts to mental health and affordable housing programs are responsible for this shameful reality.

During his tenure as president, Ronald Reagan instituted sweeping changes in domestic policy. The housing budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was cut from $77 billion in 1978 to $18 billion in 1983 and the number of beds available in public mental hospitals dropped by 40 percent between 1970 and 1984.

This divestment has put millions of people on the street, many of whom are mentally ill and whose conditions worsen by having to live on the street. The danger and degradation of homelessness can also create psychiatric disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Many local governments reacted to the very visible upsurge in those living on the streets with public space restrictions and ordinances that criminalize activities like sitting or lying on sidewalks, panhandling, and sleeping outside. These punitive policies are largely driven by the concerns of business interests, and go hand in hand with the increasing privatization of public spaces and services.

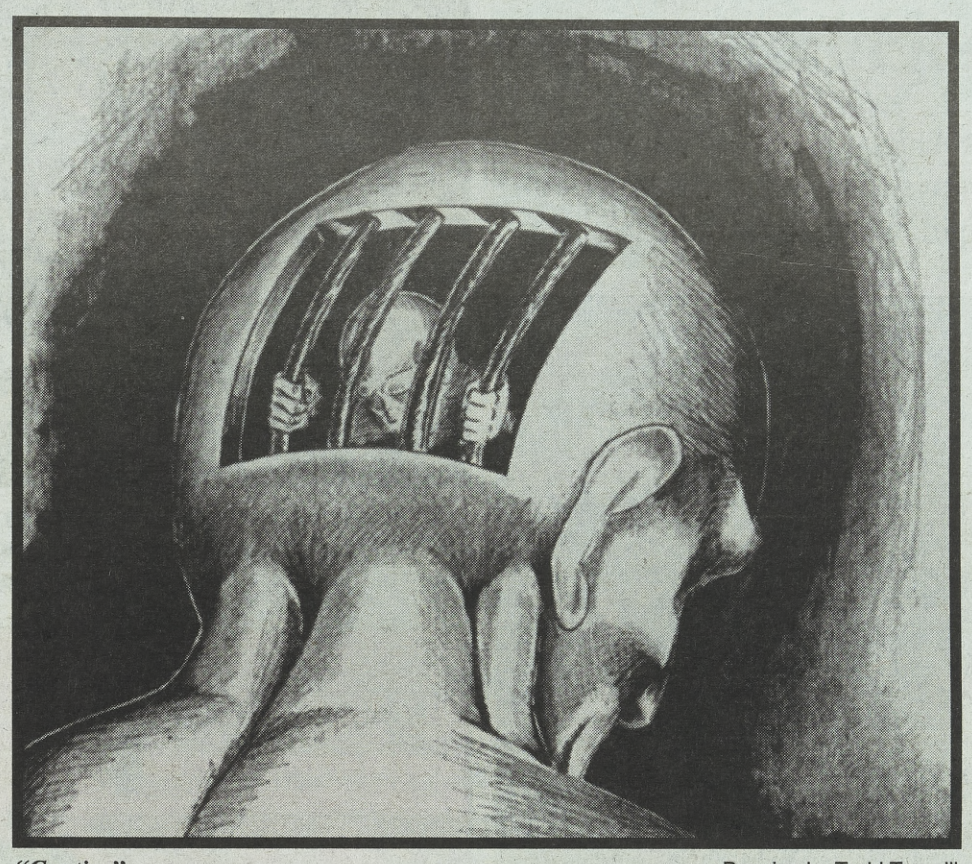
All of this has a particularly dramatic impact on people who have difficulty navigating the complex legal system. Once cited by police, a person who does not go to court or pay the fine ends up with a bench warrant permitting arrest on sight.

Arrest records can block access to housing services and benefits urgently needed to help stabilize someone who is homeless and disabled. Whether intentional or not, the bottom-line is that these laws are disenfranchising tens of thousands of mentally disabled homeless people.

BEEN HERE BEFORE

Mentally ill people have long been stigmatized by society. Often considered defective, they have been met with pity and revulsion, sometimes with reluctant charity, their "treatment" often horrific. People labeled insane have also been removed from public view, be it in attics, asylums, or jails.

Today, it is common knowledge that Riker's Island Jail in New York City, Cook County Jail in Chicago, and Los Angeles County Jail are the three largest "psychiatric facilities" in the United States, even though there is rarely any real treatment occurring in these jails. The situation is so dire at Chicago's Cook County Jail that the sheriff has threatened to file a lawsuit against the State of Illinois for allowing his jail to become a "dumping ground" for mentally disabled people.



"Captive" Drawing by Todd Tarselli

It is less known that in every county across the country there are more mentally disabled persons in the county jail than there are in the psychiatric unit of the county hospital. Nationally, a severely mentally ill person is three times more likely to be in jail or prison than in a state mental hospital. The problem is even worse in states like California, Florida, Texas, and Nevada where a mentally ill person is four to ten times more likely to be in jail or prison than in a hospital.

There is a disturbing historic precedent for locking up mentally ill people at the current alarming rates. In the middle of the 19th century, jails were filled with indigent mentally ill people criminalized under so-called poor laws. "Poor laws" were imported from England during colonial times and used to control the movement of the poor and to distinguish those considered "deserving" from those deemed "undeserving" of aid. The "undeserving poor" were punished in jails and workhouses.

Our mental health and criminal justice policies are not all that different from the poor laws of the 1850s: poor mentally ill people are languishing in jails untreated due to discriminatory "quality of life" or "nuisance crime" laws. Instead of increasing treatment and housing options in the community, we are shutting down programs and substituting them with costly jails and prisons.

Despite reports ad nauseam about the human, financial, and social toll of this approach, the overriding social policies remain aimed at simply getting mentally ill people out of sight.

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

The voices of those most impacted by these punitive measures — mentally ill homeless people themselves — are currently nowhere to be found in policy debates. To better understand the reality of those caught in the vicious cycle of insufficient treatment, homelessness, and jail at the street level, the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) and our partners conducted surveys with 336 self-identified mentally ill homeless people in seven cities — San Francisco, Los Angeles, Berkeley, and Oakland, California; Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado; Worcester, Massachusetts; and Houston, Texas. We also conducted a small online survey with 48 front-line service providers in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Portland.

The findings from the two sets of surveys build on other recent data from the Department of Justice and mental health researchers. The findings reveal a discriminatory pattern that deserves closer public scrutiny.

Results from the street outreach found:

- 80 percent reported being stopped, arrested, or cited due to "quality of life" offenses.
- 52 percent reported being harassed by private security (usually from private Business Improvement Districts).
- 48 percent reported having ignored tickets issued against them.
- 57 percent reported having bench warrants issued for their arrest.
- 22 percent reported having outstanding warrants at the time of the survey.
- 31 percent reported having been incarcerated.
- 30 percent reported having lost their housing or being discharged from a program due to incarceration, while only 5 percent reported having been referred to a program when brought before court.

This closely mirrors the experiences of service providers in various cities. The survey found that 74 percent of service providers reported that at least 70 percent of their clients had been arrested due to "quality of life" offenses.

INEFFECTIVE, EXPENSIVE, AND CRUEL

Money is being spent on jails rather than services. Municipalities, business districts, and downtown tourist centers support "quality of life" or "nuisance crime" laws because they are deemed effective at ridding homeless people from sight and lead to more lucrative and less visibly impoverished downtowns. But enforcing these laws has become an enormously expensive process.

In 2009, a California jail bed ranged from $25,000 to $55,000 per year and a bed for acute mental health care in a psychiatric unit in a California jail cost $1,350 a day. A University of Pennsylvania study in 2002 found that homeless people with mental illness who were placed in permanent housing cost the public $16,282 less per person per year compared to their previous costs for mental health, corrections, Medicaid, and public institutions and shelters.

A report issued in 2009 by the Economic Roundtable found that the typical public costs for a homeless person in Los Angeles is five times greater than for a similar person in supportive housing ($2,897 per month vs. $605 per month) largely due to emergency room and criminal justice expenses.

The scale of this issue is enormous and the cruelty, disregard, and medical neglect suffered by poor and homeless mentally ill people is unacceptable. According to the Bureau of Justice statistics, as many as 64 percent of people in jails nationwide have mental health problems. In the 1980s and early 1990s, people with severe mental illness made up 6-7 percent of the jail population. In the last five years, this percentage has climbed to 16-30 percent.

Nationwide, there are three times as many people with mental illness in jails and prisons as there are in hospitals; 40 percent of people with severe mental illness have been imprisoned at some point in their lives; and 90 percent of those incarcerated with a mental illness have been incarcerated more than once.

We deal with this national shame as we so often deal with personal shame: We pretend it isn't there and we try to hide it. It is time to bring it into daylight. The obvious answer is, of course, affordable housing and residential treatment, and ongoing outpatient treatment with practical social supports. None of this is on our current national agenda. But as a country, we must wake up to the reality that we treat mentally ill homeless people the way they were treated 150 years ago. Ignoring that truth is the real shame.

See *Street Spirit's* website:

http://www.thestreetspirit.org

Street Spirit

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From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy the Neighborhoods

The occupations have exposed America's economic divide. Now we need to find creative ways to take the movement's key issues to every neighborhood, workplace and campus.

UC students have a solution to the fiscal crisis: *"Make Banks Pay."* David Bacon photo

On November 11, thousands of University of California students walked out of their classes to protest economic inequality, budget cuts, rising tuition — and to support the Occupy Wall Street movement. David Bacon photo

An Occupy Cal activist refutes the trickle-down economic theory. David Bacon photo

by Paul Rogat Loeb

The Occupy movement has done something amazing by getting Americans to start questioning our economic divides. It has created spaces for people to come together, voice their discontents and dreams, and creatively challenge destructive greed. It has created powerful political theater, engaged the community, and provided an alternative to silence and powerlessness.

But it also faces major challenges. I'm fine that this new public commons isn't, as yet, offering detailed platforms for change. Instead, the movement has highlighted the destructive polarization of wealth while voicing what one young woman called "a cry for something better." And that's a major contribution.

The movement and its allies now need to keep spreading this message to that majority of Americans who are sympathetic but have given up on the possibility of change. The Occupy movement also needs to reach those more resistant, who might respond if seriously engaged.

It needs to make the physical occupations not just ends in themselves, but bases where more and more people can participate, and find ways to publicly act. To keep momentum building even in the winter cold, and when media coverage fades. To find continuing ways for people to act without dissipating their energy in an array of fragmented efforts. And, although some participants would disagree, to become part of a broader movement that, without muting its voice, helps bring about a better electoral outcome in 2012 than the disaster of 2010, when corporate interests prevailed again and again because those who would have rejected their lies stayed home.

One solution, which is beginning to happen, is for the movement to move to the neighborhoods, building on its existing efforts in hundreds of cities and towns. This doesn't mean abandoning the current encampments. At their best, these occupations have created powerful new centers for conversation, reflection, and creative action. People talk, brainstorm ideas, make posters and banners, and draw in the curious, including those just passing by. In Seattle, even tourists riding the amphibious tour buses broke into cheers as they drove past the encampment.

Participants tell stories of lost jobs, medical bills, and student debt, putting a human face on how they and so many others have been made expendable by a country that seems to care only for the wealthiest.

Self-organized committees plan creative tactics, handle donations of food, address medical needs, create innovative art projects, clean the occupation grounds, and ensure physical security. Common meals become a form of communion.

The gatherings also convey a sense of festival, inviting in those not yet involved with puppets, colorful banners, drum circles, radical marching bands and signs saying, "I'll believe corporations are people when Texas executes one." People dress up as predatory billionaires, Lady Liberty and dollar-spewing zombies who chant, "I smell money, I smell money."

The spirit of play echoes the defiant folk and hip hop music of Tahir Square and the Gandhi-meets-Monty-Python approaches of the Serbian youth movement Otpur, who helped train the initial Tahir Square occupiers.

But for all the value of creating visible protest communities in the centers of our cities, for all the powerful stories and Dadaist humor, most Americans are still watching from a distance as passive spectators. Tthose who care about these issues but aren't ready to sleep on the hard, cold ground, could build on the opening that this movement has created to reach out to the rest of America.

It is a victory that the occupations have led the media to even briefly question America's economic divisions. But it's not one that we can count on indefinitely. So we need to find creative ways to take the key issues that the movement has placed on the agenda to every neighborhood, workplace and campus, even those that don't seem natural hotbeds of change.

This could mean extending the existing protests to places they haven't yet reached. Bank of America, Chase, Wells Fargo and Citibank branches are everywhere. So are Exxon/Mobil stations, symbols to challenge that corporation's avoidance of taxes and massive funding of climate-change denial. So are the offices of regressive elected officials and candidates.

Harlem residents met at a local church to launch Occupy Harlem. In a Seattle neighborhood, activists criss-cross a major intersection every weekend holding banners and talking about the Iraq war and unaccountable corporate power. Seattle's main Occupy encampment recently shifted from a downtown plaza to a community college a dozen blocks away, where their presence has grown to 150 tents and they've coexisted amicably with classes, campus events, and a weekend farmers market.

For the movement to make progress, it's going to have to do more along these lines — not just hope that if they build enough tent cities and hold creative enough marches, change will come.

The people camping don't have to be the same ones working in the neighborhoods. That may be a task best suited for long-standing activist organizations, whose participants have deeper local roots — organizations that might also help find resources to shelter the Occupiers in visible sympathetic churches or union halls as we head into winter.

If we're to build on the powerful momentum that the occupations have created, we're going to need to take the issues they've raised into face-to-face communities, like local businesses and churches, soccer leagues and Rotary clubs.

The occupations have played a powerful role in highlighting America's profound economic disparities. But it's up to us to take this message to all the diverse communities we ultimately need to reach.

We can't trust capricious and compromised media outlets to adequately translate it, and relying on our own social media gives us far too narrow a reach. Fortunately, models exist for the kind of systematic grassroots outreach that could fuel the movement's next stage. Here are a few models that might offer lessons:

Many of us went door-to-door during the 2008 Obama campaign. Most who participated soon lapsed into becoming passive spectators, and then retreated still further as cycles of disillusionment grew. Whatever Obama's flaws, the one-to-one conversations people had while working to elect him were powerful, and we could begin to replicate them for a movement with goals larger than the platforms of any individual political leader or candidate.

One ongoing network to plug into is the AFL-CIO community organizing affiliate, Working America. Drawing on a mix of volunteers and paid canvassers, they've been reaching out in culturally conservative, working-class neighborhoods for the past eight years, focusing particularly on the unemployed. They talk with people about core economic issues, offer practical resource information and give ways to act on issues like unemployment benefits and investment in job-creating infrastructure.

By connecting previously isolated indi-

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Oakland Pastor Reflects on the General Strike

from page 1

For a week there was this buzz about the General Strike. I was invited to a clergy meeting which ended up at our Oakland church because it outgrew the scheduled meeting place. The meeting went on for three hours as a diverse group of 30 clergy persons met to lend their presence and plan for a peaceful outcome to the planned marches. There were to be prayers and peace rituals a half an hour before the morning events, which began at 9 a.m., the noon rally, and the 5 p.m. march to shut down the Port of Oakland.

Valerie and I arrived before 11 a.m. We arrived at something big, something huge. As we drove into town there was an unusual calm. Even the unusually quiet traffic seemed serene. There seemed to be something different about our city. We parked the car at the church, four blocks from the city center, and began walking to City Hall. As we turned the corner on 14th Street, we saw a huge crowd filling the intersection of 14th and Broadway.

As we walked closer, we saw a black sign stretching across the street with large, silver-painted words announcing: "Death to Capitalism." The crowd was massive. There were people everywhere. If there were thousands at the rally the week before, there were tens of thousands there on November 2.

We moved toward the Interfaith tent and found our friends there, already singing to a gathered crowd within the crowd. My friend Francisco was playing the guitar and singing. My new friend and Unitarian pastor Nickles was holding the mike and bullhorn. We all sang together with a gathered crowd of about 100 people.

After the song, Rabbi Michael Lerner deputized those listening to go tell the message of the movement. He addressed the critics and explained that the Occupy Movement is about building a Caring Society. He said, "We are a network of people who share the common idea that the world can and must be based on love, generosity, caring for one another and caring for our planet." He called for an Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The amendment would overturn Citizen's United and declare that corporations are not entitled to the same rights as human beings; eliminate private and corporate funding of elections; and, finally, require periodic assessments of corporate conduct. His was a cry for a society in which people are valued more than profits and the earth is respected as a living organism requiring deliberate attention and care.

The time came for the noon marches. A children's march was leaving from the Oakland Library at noon; some of my friends and co-workers were headed that way. Other marches were simultaneously on the move. Valerie and I joined a mass of people moving down 14th Street toward the library. We were among a multitude filling all four lanes of the street for as far as one could see. The crowd was dense and headed north toward the place where several bank branches were clustered.

Neither Valerie nor I knew where we were headed, nor what route we would take or who was leading us, but we knew why we were there. We, like 99% of the people marching in Oakland, moving with and among unorganized masses, were unified by the desperate condition of our world, our families and our collective future.

We were the cry of the lost oak trees that once lived here, as well as the moans of the Ohlone people who once thrived here. But most of all, we were the prayer sent to the God of the universe, pleading for substantive change to the dark and devolutionary path on which we are currently traveling with increasing speed.

Demonstrators climbed on top of big rig trucks stranded when the Port of Oakland was shut down. Ariel Messman-Rucker photo

Occupy Oakland held one of the largest demonstrations in history on the day of the General Strike. Ariel Messman-Rucker photo

Valerie and I were joined by one of our church members as we walked along Franklin Street. The three of us finished that noon march together. Throughout the day, I saw several members of our congregation marching in different contingents.

We paused to watch a man and a woman expertly climb lampposts across Webster Street and unfurl a banner that read, "Occupy the Banks." I noted that there were some who knew exactly where we were going and had plans for the route. We paused briefly at the large Bank of America on Harrison Street and then went back to Broadway for the march back to the city center. The crowd was innumerable. The sense of peace and hope was immeasurable. The sense of community and common destiny was palatable.

I began these thoughts stating that on November 2, I was among millions. I believe that this is true, not because I wish to exaggerate the number of those who peacefully possessed the city yesterday, nor to engage in poetic hyperbole.

My wife, fellow congregants and I were among millions on November 2 because along with the tens of thousands that were in the streets of Oakland that day, there are hundreds of thousands in California whose hearts and hopes we carried with us. And around the world, there are literally millions, who from Tirhir Square to right here in Oakland, resonate with the need for change, the willingness to be a part of that change and the inexplicable sense that this is the moment in which change must occur.

There is one troubling part of the General Strike. I did not see many African American clergy, other than myself and a few students. I was asked by a reporter why that was the case and what did I think African Americans think about the Occupy Movement. Well, the second question was the easiest to answer. I told the reporter that I could not speak for African Americans nor accurately reflect any imaginary consensus they may hold.

The first question, however, does give me pause. I am a part of several clergy groups and all except one have ignored the movement. None have yet engaged in any theological reflection on the dynamic of our time or how it is embodied in the Occupy Movement, but it is time.

We who would like to think of ourselves as progressives or as followers of Christ should shout "Hosana!" with the crowd or be counted as the modern-day Pharisees too foolish to follow the current movement of God.

Brian K. Woodson is the senior pastor of the Bay Area Christian Connection, an inner-city church in Oakland with a women's treatment program and a food program that distributed more than 435,000 pounds of food this year to inner-city residents.

The Obscene Wealth of the 1%

by Pastor Brian K. Woodson

Wall Street thugs and pinstripe gangsters have stolen our homes with credit default swaps. They have pilfered our pensions with their over-leveraged, undercapitalized positions. And for all their larceny, they get bailed out and we get bailed on. The money we need is sitting useless in their bank accounts. Tax the rich!

The American military budget is over $800 billion that we can count. The Pentagon budget is largely unknown and unquestionably out of control. If we need money, cut the defense budget. America is like a home whose parents are spending so much money on burglar alarms and security systems there is no money to feed the children.

We don't need any more bombs. We need books. We don't need any more bullets. We need butter and bread. We don't need any more foreign horrors to fear. We need homes and good jobs. We need the decency of living wages and hope in return for our hard labor.

For the past 30 years, the top 1 percent have engorged themselves in obscene wealth and it is time for them to pay their fair share. We who work for a living demand to be able to live from our work. Put some billionaires behind bars and they'll stop stealing so much. And put American workers back to work.

From Tahrir Square to right here! The workers of the world must unite, 'less all of us be defeated!

A Modest Proposal to Drive Away the Poor for the Sake of the Tourists

Art by Michael Joseph

Commentary by Buford Buntin

In her *San Francisco Examiner* column on Nov. 8, 2011, Melissa Griffin claims that tourists are being driven away from the Bay Area because of "homelessness and panhandling," which is why, in her estimation, *Conde Nast Traveler Magazine* now ranks San Francisco as the nation's number-two destination, instead of its 18-year run as number one in tourist attraction.

Out of Griffin's full-page analysis of everything San Francisco, about one-quarter of the page is devoted to a photo and article featuring a man holding a sign and cup, while a woman with what appears to be a designer shopping bag looks on at the man's unfortunate dilemma.

Griffin writes that a CityBeat poll conducted by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce shows that when 500 locals were asked to list the major issues facing San Francisco, 32 percent of respondents said "homelessness and panhandling."

In a display of analytical acumen — at least as much as can be crammed into a small portion of one newspaper page — Griffin writes that, "some speculate that the unfriendly folks listed by one-third of the respondents were panhandlers."

"Maybe we are all less friendly because we must be bundled up in layers of stoicism just to walk down the street," Griffin claims. For a concluding point, she says, "And nobody seems to care."

I'll agree with the last statement in her mini-article. No one *does* seem to care, except for those advocating for the homeless and poor citizens of San Francisco. I can't make up my mind if she does or does not care herself, given the conservative nature of most of her columns in the overwhelmingly conservative *San Francisco Examiner*. She seems empathetic only with the mainstream citizens.

The angst expressed by Griffin, and by tourists and stout, hard-working citizens, stems from the reality that they cannot always avoid walking where poor people are trying to survive on the streets where they are not getting the help they need.

The fact that many fancy hotels are crammed into the crowded Tenderloin District and other low-income districts in the city is not the poor people's fault. They're just there because they have to be somewhere. They would, I'm sure, be living in a fancier neighborhood without crime or grime, if they could.

Virtually everything about capitalism says that only the one percent upper-income really counts, while the 99% who struggle for everything don't deserve to even survive. The Occupy movement is trying to point out this flaw in a very concrete way by camping out and protesting on the front lines of the United States.

The last truly Democratic president, Jimmy Carter, carried out a good employment training program before we entered a depressing period of United States history, economically and psychologically, for a large portion of the population. Ronald Reagan and George Bush Senior championed the rich and tried to completely destroy the poor, instead of providing them jobs and low-cost housing, something, of course, which continues to be a devastating problem today.

Our city's vaunted status as number one is gone as a tourist fantasy for the middle and upper classes coming to San Francisco to enjoy the breath-taking views on the cable car of their dreams.

Now let's get down to reality and house and feed the poor.

Surviving Uncaring Board and Cares

Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

Even the name "board and care" is a misnomer. Often, the people who ran these homes couldn't care less about their residents.

by Joanna Bragen

As I sit in my chair in my two-bedroom, Section 8 apartment looking at my sweet dog asleep on my couch, I can't believe how far I have come. My past housing, as a person with mental illness, has changed 180 degrees.

When I first came out of my first hospital stay, I was still married to my ex-husband, but stayed with my parents so that they could help take care of me while he worked. I suffered from akathisia, with physical agitation and intense anxiety, and spent half the night walking circles inside their house. Eventually, I moved back to El Cerrito with my (then) husband.

I underwent many hospitalizations and ended up in many "board and care" homes. Even the name is a misnomer. Too often, the people who ran these homes really couldn't care less about their residents. Board and cares are the biggest racket I have ever seen.

I experienced endless abuses there: substandard housing, lack of food, and nearly no nutritious food. In only one board and care, where the workers were really mean, did I ever have fresh fruits and vegetables. The board and care took almost all of my paycheck and barely expended any money on the residents. I had to buy my own toilet paper.

I have been forced to throw out a sandwich I was going to eat, because I was five minutes past "curfew." At one place, it was so bad I tried to find other places to sleep, and when my mother came to visit, the owner tried to say I was a "slut." I moved out that day. At this same place, a man (who no one could identify, strangely) tried to enter my room at night. Also, the owner's daughter stole my shoes.

Even a board and care that was run by a pretty reputable mental health company, was a very negative experience. This facility was the best place I stayed, but staff members were often cruel and condescending. Also, you had to be gone most of the day, forbidden to remain in your "home" during the daytime hours.

When I graduated from the Spirit program in Contra Costa County, I looked for a job in mental health. I did not go to an outpatient program any more, so did not have plans every day. Because of this, the very arrogant director said I was being manipulative.

At the board and care in Richmond, I met a boyfriend who finally found me a better place to live, in Concord. From there, I met my husband, moved to a low-rent apartment at Riverhouse in Martinez, and then got a Section 8 housing subsidy.

I am thankful for the great place I have now, with gardens all around it. I will always remember the horrors at board and cares. I especially enjoy locking my door, and knowing I can control who and what goes on in my own home.

The Disservice of Treating Disabled Persons as Children

by Jack Bragen

A stereotype of persons with mental illness promulgated by mental health professionals is that we are of lesser competence, lesser ability and lesser intelligence than they. This serves as a prior assumption so that the condescension from treatment professionals is apparent from the very start of contact.

The idea that we are "less" than normal is often not accurate, but may eventually become part of someone's belief system after it has been drummed constantly into their psyche for years or decades.

Mental health caregivers commonly believe that we ought to be in protected situations because we are not ready for "the real deal" in life. This attitude of caring for persons with mental illness and not letting them do things on their own produces children in the bodies of adults.

Most of the popular models of mental health treatment espouse "sheltered" situations in which the disabled person is protected from the harsh realities of mainstream existence. I object to this. This type of "protection" only prepares the disabled person for a lifetime of being dependent on institutionalization. This is no life.

The belief that someone with mental illness is incapable of surviving in "real life situations" is belittling and harmful. Despite having a disability, many persons with mental illness are up to the challenge of surviving in society.

Of course, public benefits should be offered. The "survival" I am talking about is where a person handles their own financial, medical and social affairs, lives in a situation in which they have real interactions with real people, and is the guide in their own existence.

This may include dealing with a supervisor, business associate, or landlord who is private and is not part of the mental health treatment system, and paying one's own bills and rent with one's own checking account. A mental health consumer needs to be involved in shopping for one's own groceries, being responsible for one's own meals, putting gas in one's own car and seeing that it is maintained, even if a parent is helping financially with affording the car.

The survival I am talking about, then, is not a situation of going off disability and other assistance. It is merely no longer living as a child for whom someone else must make all the decisions. I am not talking about pretending there is no disability. I am saying that persons with mental illness can and should be encouraged to live as people who are competent.

The clubhouse approach of most mental health agencies doesn't prepare people for this. Their assumption is that most of the people walking through their doors must have everything done for them.

I've dealt with handling my own affairs since the time I was 18 and diagnosed with schizophrenia. I have also dealt with threatening situations of standing up to criminals, and of refusing to be a victim. I have dealt with relationships, and I have been married for 15 years.

I deal with driving and with public transportation. I deal with the budgeting of my meager income on a continuous basis. I take care of pets and I take them to a veterinarian when they are sick. Under no circumstances should I be deemed "incompetent." Other persons with mental illness can do the same.

You are not doing a disabled person any favors when you attempt to protect them from life. It perpetuates the myth that we are made of lesser material than that of a "normal person" and it makes us unprepared for life's difficult truths that we all must someday face.

"Forgotten Man." **A destitute man is ignored by passers-by.** Art by Maynard Dixon

ARREST THE HOMELESS

by Robert Christophel

"Arrest the homeless," they do cry. Complete the economic genocide. From sea to shinning sea, there is no place for him to pea.

Arrest him for vagrancy, arrest him for loitering, but just insure there is no tolerance. No shelter from rain, no shower to wash away the pain.

Arrest these crazy, lazy men; how they do offend.

Take the tax dollar they gladly spend, to lock these people in a pen.

Thirty thousand dollars they will spend to fill them with fear and bring to tears. No place to call home — left only to Rome.

"Arrest the homeless," they do cry, for you can see it in their eyes. No food, no job and now a criminal record; the probation officer won't get the message.

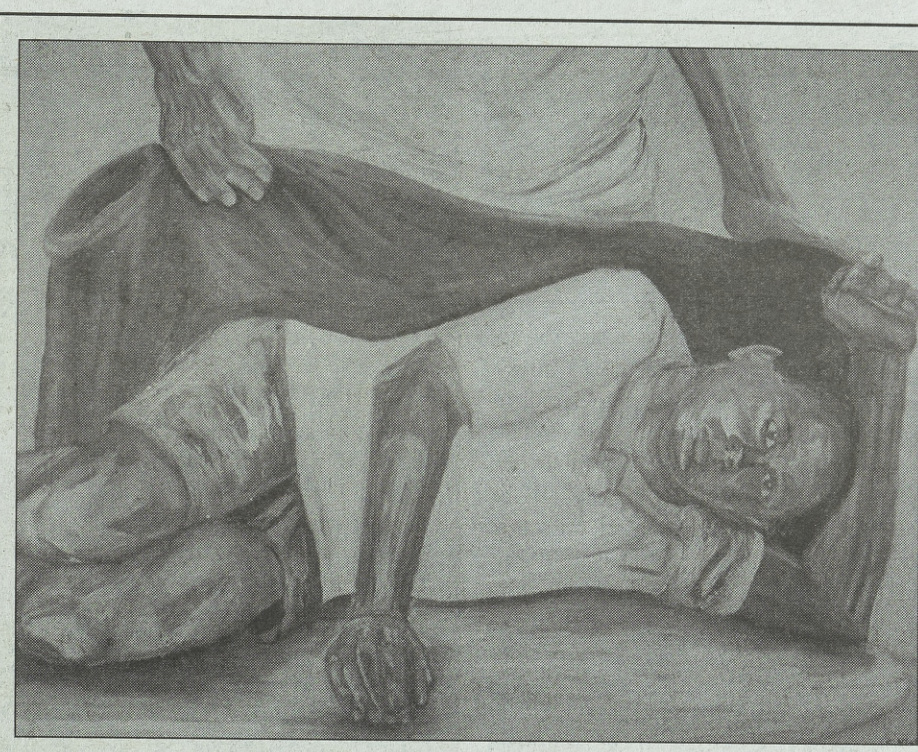
Not a teepee or a tent shall be lent, for that's not what their God meant. They teach them in jail how to fail and fear, fill them with violence and demand their silence. Arrest the homeless where they stand, for the drug war is at hand, They will not stand to share this land.

Arrest the homeless; they must cease, even if a man of peace. They don't pray in our church but play in the dirt. Look — she has no skirt!

It's the moral thing to do, to keep them to our rule. The goodness of nature and God's natural goodness must be denied, for these they criminalize.

Arrest the homeless for they must; for it's only in their god they trust.

Arrest the homeless till he dies, for he's only a paycheck away from you or I.



"Warmth in Giving 4" **In this painting by Elizabeth King, a compassionate person covers a homeless man with a blanket.** Painting by Elizabeth King

I Am Loved

by JC Orton

When you cover me – and place a blanket over me when I am cold.
When I hunger for your touch — and you reach out and embrace my heart.
When I am afraid and lonely — and you comfort me with your presence.
When my body is tired and I ache —
you are there and your touch is the balms that heals me.
My stomach growls —
You hear my need and that of my brothers and sisters
and share your food and drink with us.
I am without —
And find myself in the presence of friends who care.
I sleep in the cold —
And you awaken me and invite me to share your humble dwelling.
The warmth of Spirit and care is an essence which is ever-present in this house —
because I am loved.

J.C. Orton is the new coordinator of the Street Spirit vendor prgram. He also is the director of the Night on the Streets Cahtolic Worker in the East Bay.

Occupy the Neighborhoods

Part of the tragedy of the past three years is that we didn't have vital independent movements pushing both parties to deal with unemployment, foreclosures, and America's massive economic divides.

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viduals with a broader engaged community, they both give them a voice and leave them far more resistant to greed-driven lies.

Since the economic crisis hit, the Boston community group City Life Vida Urbana began using official foreclosure lists to engage people at risk of losing their homes or apartments. They offer free legal advice as a way to encourage people to come to their meetings, then invite participants to join their protests at foreclosure auctions and at mortgage-holding banks, mustering enough public pressure to repeatedly force these institutions to write down loans that people owe.

Another fertile approach comes from Seattle peace activists. Shortly before the Iraq war, people from all over the region met in a large sympathetic church and divided themselves up by neighborhoods, including those in far-flung suburbs and smaller outlying cities. The local groups then met together to find ways to act in their specific communities, under the umbrella of what they called The Snow Coalition. Eight years later, many of these groups continue raising issues in contexts where people are more likely to know them as neighbors, coworkers, or friends.

The movements that brought us the New Deal in the Depression had a mix of local actions, intense community building (including powerful mutual aid institutions), and engagement in local and national politics — even as they remained independent enough to push Franklin Roosevelt to take his most powerful stands.

The civil rights movement mixed courageous direct action with door-to-door community organizing and voter registration, pushing an initially sympathetic but resistant Lyndon Johnson to put all his political skill into passing the Voting Rights and Civil Rights acts, even as he acknowledged that the Democrats would consequently "lose the South for a generation."

The anti-Vietnam War movements started with small groups of people having the audacity to challenge their government, then began to make an impact when people in every community began to participate. All these past movements were able to successfully meld protest and witness with organizing.

If the Occupy movement is going to find a similarly fertile path as these movements, it's going to have to let go of grandiose revolutionary dreams like the sentiments of a student who told me, "If we're following the Arab Spring model we have to demand that all the politicians step down. Then Americans can meet and decide what to do." Except that Egypt didn't have real elections and we do, however compromised by wealth-driven lies.

So while the Occupiers need to maintain their independent voice, many of us will have to engage in messy electoral work to overcome the millions of dollars that will be pumped in for anonymous attack ads by people like Karl Rove, the Koch Brothers, the predatory banks, and oil and coal companies. If the Occupiers steer people away from electoral participation, they risk helping those at the top prevail even more.

That's a real possibility, given the blanket dismissal of voting by far too many of the Occupy participants I've spoken with, or at least of voting within the two party system. The constantly repeated phrase "they're all corrupt," has its truths, but it also slams the courageous along with the compromised, and masks the major difference between politicians who disappoint us because we haven't pressed them hard enough, and ones who've been doing their best to make the entire country and planet available for plunder.

If we want to avoid permanently enshrining the reign of the one percent, we might remember the Citizen's United decision, where five Republican justices opened the floodgates for money to dominate politics as never before. If any of the current Republican candidates get to appoint one more justice, we'll lock in similar decisions for the next 30 years.

We might also remember the Disclose Act, which would have at least required corporations and wealthy individuals to visibly put their names on ads and mailers that they funded. Every Democratic senator voted for it, even those most compromised with corporate dollars, but it fell one vote short when it couldn't get a single Republican backer.

The result, combined with a massive drop-off from a disillusioned Democratic base, was a wave of anonymously funded attack ads that swung election after election, from legislative, Congressional and Senate seats to electing governors like Scott Walker, Rick Scott and John Kasich, who promptly disenfranchised voters, gutted education and social services, busted unions, stripped away environmental protections, and handed out ever-more massive tax breaks to the rich.

I'm not suggesting the Occupy movement subordinate itself to Obama, the Democrats, or any other party. Part of the tragedy of the past three years is that we didn't have vital independent movements pushing both parties to deal with unemployment, foreclosures, and America's massive economic divides. But nothing stops the Occupy movement from raising their key issues as clearly and powerfully as possible, while reminding people that showing up at the polls still matters.

The alternative is a revolutionary purism, where instead of registering voters like the Tea Party did, and reaching out to engage those on the fence, Occupy participants and their supporters stay home and hand the 2012 election to people who represent everything they loathe.

Like participants in previous movements for justice, the Occupiers need to avoid the false choices between protest and organizing, community building and electoral involvement, surrealist theater and the grunt work of change.

The criticisms they raise go beyond any single election, bill, or policy. They need to keep raising them, but in ways that keep spiraling out. If they can trigger enough conversations in communities as yet untouched by their voices, they have a chance to prevail. But they have to recognize that the powerful public presence they've created is just a beginning.

Oakland Protest Against State Budget Cuts

from page 1

Chiang, the state budget has a shortfall of $1.5 billion, a far cry from the $4 billion in additional revenue required to avoid the trigger cuts.

After the budget numbers are certified on Dec. 15, 2011, the decision will be made to impose these trigger cuts that would then go into effect on Jan. 1, 2012.

If the trigger cuts occur, the following are only some of the disastrous reductions that are expected:

1. In Home Supportive Services will be cut by another $100 million.
2. Childcare funding will be cut by $23 million.
3. Medi-Cal Managed Care will be cut by $10 million.
4. The Departmental of Developmental Services will be cut by $100 million.

At the Oakland demonstration on November 15, boona cheema, executive director of BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency) warned that these severe cuts would destroy countless lives.

"I wanted to share that there is no sunshine in the California budget," cheema said. "There is no sunshine in the homes of people whose services have been cut. There is no sunshine in the homes of folks who have lost their jobs. All across the country, we call that balancing the budget. We don't call that destroying lives.

"What is happening in our communities is that we are destroying lives. We are hurting children. We are having to look into refrigerators that have no food in them. This absolutely cannot continue."

Cheema, the moderator of the rally, urged the demonstrators to keep showing up at protests, saying that people's lives depend on their courage and perseverance.

She said, "Join with me in saying, 'Taxes, not triggers.' We are part of bringing the sunshine back with our courage — by showing up. We need to show up in Sacramento on December 15 when these cuts may go through. Half of the struggle is showing up — and letting people hear the stories that we have to tell from our communities."

Deep cuts to In-Home Support

Lauren Steinberg, Systems Change Advocate at the Center for Independent Living, sounded a warning about the massive damage that will be caused by reductions to disabled adults needing In Home Support Services. The California legislature should not expect low-income people with disabilities to bear the burden of any further cutbacks, she said. Instead, she challenged the legislature to bring in more tax revenue, "particularly from corporations and higher-income brackets."

According to Steinberg, if the trigger cuts are imposed, a large percentage of the disabled people that depend upon In Home Supportive Services will see a 20 percent reduction in the number of hours of assistance they are allotted for personal assistance each month. "This will make it very difficult for people to live independently," she said.

Ending up in a nursing home

Michelle Rousey, a disabled woman in a wheelchair, lives in Oakland and receives In Home Support Services (IHHS). She told the rally she is facing a 20 percent reduction in her hours of IHHS assistance because of the trigger cuts.

She said, "With my IHHS services, I have a caregiver that comes into my home to provide care for me, and this means she'll be in my home 20 percent less often. For me, that means I will possibly end up in a nursing home. I don't get enough hours now. I want the state to know they should not be cutting IHHS again. We've already had serious cuts, and another 20 percent cut is not good."

Disabled people, mothers with children and seniors rallied in Oakland to protest state budget cutbacks. Janny Castillo photo

"The people who are the most affected are primarily very low-income women — either working parents, childcare providers, In Home Support Service workers. It's sad to me that when the decisions were made about who would be affected in the first level of cuts, it's women and children first." — Patty Siegel, California Child Care Research and Referral Network

Seniors already have suffered the devastating loss of many essential, life-sustaining programs. On Dec. 1, 2011, seniors were threatened with yet another calamitous setback, with 35,000 seniors facing the closure of Adult Day Health Care facilities due to a Medi-Cal cutback.

Disability Rights California filed a federal class-action lawsuit that was settled on Nov. 17, 2011. The suit will delay closure of senior centers in California while a new system is being created. It is yet to be seen how the new system will work, but in the meantime, the planned closure of the centers has been postponed.

This was a hard-fought struggle just to preserve part of the existing services for seniors. It takes unrelenting vigilance to protect the rights of seniors and disabled people, and every small victory requires a constant struggle.

Yet, other Medi-Cal cuts have already occurred. Recipients have lost the right to dental services and optical care and the upcoming trigger cuts will slash another $15 million from state medical coverage.

'Looming terror' faces seniors

Karen Smulevitz from United Seniors of Oakland powerfully expressed the fearful insecurity and the sense of being abandoned that consumes seniors facing what she called the "looming terror" of cuts that will damage or eliminate programs they depend on for their very survival.

Smulevitz said, "We all are suffering already from budget cuts that have been made and the looming terror before us of more cuts. It's just unimaginable. You've heard so many stories about how people are suffering now, trying to get doctor's appointments, trying to get care. What will happen with even more cuts?"

Smulevitz went straight to the heart of what has gone wrong in a society that balances its budget by reducing poor people, children and seniors to desperate poverty.

She said, "The situation we are in is immoral, when the wealthy are the wealthiest in history and have *everything* — more than they need. They want to balance the budget on us, on children, on disabled people, on the elderly. People who have nothing left to give and they want to take more from us. It's just immoral.

"If they did a fair tax, there would be enough revenue to take care of everyone's needs. What kind of a society are we living in where people can suffer and other people just ignore that and refuse to pay their fair share of taxes? It's not right. It's scary. We need to make sure it doesn't happen."

'Even if we have to come out in our wheelchairs!'

LaTanya Wolf, a senior advocate from the Hope and Justice Committee at St. Mary's Center in Oakland, told the rally how the cuts affected her own family, especially her children and grandchildren.

Wolf said, "I am a senior citizen, a grandmother and great-grandmother. I have a sister that uses In Home Support Services — which will be cut. She has a serious disease and is withering away. Recent cuts have already devastated the social safety nets and resulted in job losses."

Wolf spoke very poignantly to a rally filled with seniors, many people in wheelchairs, and parents with children. She said, "This affects everybody. We need to keep talking and chanting and keep marching. Even if we have to come out in our wheelchairs, even if we have to come out with our guide dogs, even if we have to bring our children, even if we have to come out limping, we will be heard!"

Wolf was on target in warning about how the trigger cuts may jeopardize families and children. Low-income families in California who need subsidized childcare will be profoundly affected.

Patty Siegel, executive director of the California Child Care Research and Referral Network, said that the June budget imposed a $300 million reduction to childcare programs. Now, if the projected shortfall is $4 billion, then the trigger cut to childcare is anticipated at $23 million. Siegel said, "We have a childcare system right now in California that is more fragile than I've ever known it in the 40 years that I have worked in the childcare arena."

Women and children first

Siegel said it is a cruel reality that women will end up facing the greater part of these extremely damaging cuts.

"The people who are the most affected are primarily very low-income women — either working parents, childcare providers, In Home Support Service workers," Siegel said. "It's sad to me that when the decisions were made about who would be affected in the first level of cuts, it's women and children first. The number of women and children affected is quite disproportionate."

Clarissa Doutherd is a mother of a four-year-old child and a member of Parent Voices, a parent-led, grassroots organization that fights to make childcare affordable for all families. She has already experienced the destructive effects of the budget cuts in her own family.

"In June of this year, I lost my childcare due to budget cuts," she told the rally. "We cannot allow this to happen to other families. I am here today not only to share my story but to speak on behalf of the 200,000 families without childcare who desperately need it. And to speak on behalf of the thousands of children who will lose the opportunity to learn, and their parents who will lose their jobs because there is no one to care for their children.

"Limiting access to childcare for working families is not a way to stabilize our economy or create a better California. By cutting childcare, everyone loses. We are sending the wrong message when our government provides subsidies and tax breaks for corporations, yet cannot educate and care for our most vulnerable."

Speaking out for the voiceless

A spirit was in the air at the rally — a deeply felt sense that we gathered together to speak out for the voiceless, and for the children too young to attend, for the seniors who are housebound, for those incapacitated by illness who cannot leave their beds, for disabled people who need in-home attendants.

All of these people need more than the meager levels of assistance that is left to them. With all the cuts they've already suffered, it is deeply unjust for the government to take any more away.

The poor and the disabled, the sick and the elderly have already taken the brunt of our nation's economic problems. Why is all of the burden placed on the shoulders of the poorest of the poor?

A society that cares so little about children, seniors and the disabled is a society that is becoming merciless. The constant erosion of the safety net cannot be tolerated. We must listen to these voices and act for justice for everyone.

"Trigger cuts." We must not let that trigger be pulled on the children, seniors and disabled members of our community.